DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 640 CG 027 732

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TITLE	Violence in Dating Relationships: A Review.
PUB DATE	6 Nov 96
NOTE	22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (Tuscaloosa, AL, November 6-8, 1996).
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*College Students; *Dating (Social); Higher Education; Interpersonal Relationship; *Literature Reviews; *Locus of Control; Student Attitudes; Victims of Crime; *Violence
IDENTIFIERS	*Conflict Tactics Scale; *Dating Violence

ABSTRACT

Some researchers have likened an abusive relationship to the conditions encountered by hostages or prisoners of war. To better understand abusive relationships, a summary of research related to violence in dating relationships, with a particular emphasis on college students, is presented here. The review begins with a description of the most commonly used instrument for assessing violence in dating and other relationships: the Conflict Tactics Scale. This overview is followed by consideration of the prevalence and the scope of dating violence. Further consideration is given to locus of control as one factor that may affect understanding of the issues surrounding violence in dating relationships. It is noted that violence in relationships has been studied extensively since the 1970s. Individuals in psychologically abusive settings may experience isolation, loss of self-esteem, powerlessness, and feelings of helplessness. Violence can result in the victim suffering from lessened self-efficacy, emotional and physical health problems, and an increase in substance use and abuse. Among college students, dating violence can have costly consequences for self-identity, intimate relationships, academic success, and adult-like independence. Contains 67 references. (RJM)

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ED 407 640

VIOLENCE IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS: A REVIEW

Presented at the Annual Conference of

Mid-South Educational Research Association

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

November 6, 1996

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Patricia C. Glascock, Ed.S.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present a summary of reported information related to violence in dating relationships. The content of the paper is taken from a comprehensive literature review conducted by the second author under the supervision of the first author. The presentation of this paper will provide a foundation for viewing data regarding the prevalence of dating violence among a sample of undergraduate college students and the relationship between locus of control and dating violence among these students.

VIOLENCE IN DATING RELATIONSHIPS: A REVIEW

Abuse in relationships has a long history. In earlier times, men had legal rights to beat their wives. In one example, the law allowed a man to beat his wife with a rod as long as it was not wider than the man's thumb, thus providing the origin of the saying "rule of thumb" (Siegel, Jacobs, & Foster, 1989). The issue of abuse in relationships has been recognized as a social problem with implications for the family only for the past 20 to 25 years (Hennekens, 1991; Hofelier, 1983; Walker, 1979).

Beginning in the 1970s, violence in relationships has been studied extensively. In the early days, most of the research was focused on violence in family relationships. Straus (1974, 1979), for example, studied conflict within family dynamics. He examined the use of violent behaviors as coping resources in resolving conflicts between spouses, among siblings, and between parents and children. Gelles and Cornell (1985) concluded that pushing, shoving, and spanking are so common-place--so "normal" in many relationships--that people experience violence, rather than love, as their standard.

Walker (1979, 1984, 1988) concentrated her research on the topic of spousal abuse, bringing to public awareness the plight of battered women. Several researchers (Ellis, 1992; Johnson & Ferraro, 1988; Lo & Sporakowski, 1989; O'Leary & Arias, 1988) subsequently studied violence as it is experienced by women and the reasons that they stay in abusive relationships.

In 1981, Makepeace expanded the focus of relationship violence research beyond family dynamics and spousal abuse to include the premarriage or courtship period. He demonstrated that violence is experienced by college students in dating relationships. Since

his benchmark study, such violence has received increased attention (Avni, 1991; Billingham & Sack, 1987; Flynn, 1990; Johnson & Ferraro, 1988; Mason & Blankenship, 1987). By definition, dating violence is the threat or perpetration of an act of physical aggression within the context of the dating process; that is, it occurs in unmarried couples involved in a dyadic relationship focused on participation in mutually rewarding activities that may increase the likelihood of future interaction, emotional commitment, or sexual intimacy (Benard & Schlaffer, 1992; Follingstad, Rutledge, McNeill-Harkin, & Polek, 1992; Sugarman & Hotaling, 1989).

The purpose of this paper is to present a summary of literature related to the topic of violence in dating relationships, with particular emphasis on college students. The review begins with a description of the most commonly-used instrument for assessing violence in dating and other relationships. That is followed by consideration of the prevalence and scope of dating violence. Next, consideration is given to locus of control as one factor that may impact understanding of the issues surrounding the topic of violence in dating relationships. Finally, the paper closes with comments about the consequences of dating violence, with some emphasis on the impact in college settings.

Assessment of Violence in Relationships

Straus (1974, 1977, 1979) developed an instrument called the Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) to assess the ways that individuals resolve conflict in family situations. The CTS is described as the most widely-used tool for assessing violence in relationships (Johnson & Ferraro, 1988). It has been adapted for use as the primary instrument in studies measuring types and amounts of violence in dating relationships (Billingham, 1987; Billingham & Sack,

1986, 1987; Cate, Henton, & associates, 1982; Henton, Cate, & associates, 1983; Laner & Thompson, 1982; Levy, 1991; Makepeace, 1981).

The CTS (Straus, 1979) is organized in three subscales derived through factor analysis; the scales are called Reasoning, Verbal Aggression, and Violence. The Reasoning subscale includes three items that represent a rational discussion (intellectual) approach to resolving conflict. The Verbal Aggression subscale includes six items that represent using words or nonverbal actions to symbolically hurt or threaten harm to the other. And, the Violence subscale includes eight items that represent acts of physical force against another.

The CTS (Straus, 1979) is presented in the context of disagreements so respondents will view conflict as normal. Items are ordered from the least coercive and aggressive to the most forceful and violent. Starting with items that are seen as having positive value and moving gradually toward tactics that might be considered as the means to use only if all else fails is thought to encourage respondents to be more willing to endorse the more violent actions if they do occur (Caulfield & Riggs, 1992; Straus, 1974, 1979; Ten Vergert, Kingma, & Gillespie, 1990). Items of the CTS are depicted in Appendix A.

Respondents are asked to indicate the frequency of each action by themselves over the previous year. They also may be asked to indicate the frequency of each action by another person with whom they interact (e.g., a dating partner). Instruments that require both indications are typical of the research using the CTS to measure dating violence.

Although Straus (1979) developed a scoring system for the CTS, a commonly-used method is for the researcher to simply choose a minimum number of specific acts that define violence, either inflicted or experienced. A respondent who inflicts less than the minimum is

considered Not Violent; one who inflicts the minimum or more is considered Violent. One who experiences the minimum or more is considered a Victim; one experiencing below the minimum is considered Not a Victim (Theodore, 1992). This method is best for use in dating relationships because Straus' scoring system was normed using a population of married couples and families.

Reported reliability and content validity studies, likewise, suffer from the limitation of having been conducted with married couples and families, but not dating partners. Nonetheless, the CTS (Straus, 1979) does seem to have good construct validity. This is best demonstrated by its use in numerous studies where it elicits high rates of occurrence for socially undesirable acts, including use of a knife or gun. These results have been confirmed through indepth interviews with respondents (Straus).

The CTS (Straus, 1979) has been criticized on the basis of variability in its factor loading. In contrast to Straus' three factors, Caulfield and Riggs (1992) concluded that four components--Reasoning, Verbal Aggression/Coercion, Physical Aggression/Threat, and Severe Aggression--would provide better assessment of the dynamics of violence in dating relationships.

Another criticism is based on the importance of assessing the antecedents of violent action in ways that account for the context in which the behavior occurs. Some believe the CTS is limited in that it is based on an assumption that violence occurs in the context of conflictual situations when, in fact, it may occur in contexts which have nothing to do with overt conflict (e.g., an intoxicated spouse beats a mate just to exercise power) (Ferraro, 1988; Johnson & Ferraro, 1988).

Knowing whether an act was initiative or retaliation would be helpful in assessing use of violence as a conflict resolution tactic. But, the CTS (Straus, 1979) does not address the meaning of actions or deal with the fact that violent behaviors differ in type (Rhodes, 1992). For example, the dynamics in different forms of family violence--including child abuse, spouse abuse, sibling abuse--and dating violence probably differ considerably.

Finally, the CTS (Straus, 1979) suffers from the same limitation that characterizes many self-report instruments. According to Rhodes (1992), it lacks language uniformity; some of the items are specific descriptions of violent acts, whereas others are phrased in such a general manner that they are prone to subjective interpretation. Johnson and Ferraro (1988) agreed that the language used makes some of the items open to subjective interpretation, but noted that using personal interviews to eliminate this ambiguity would not be feasible for gathering information from large numbers of people in a short time.

Prevalence and Scope of Dating Violence

Reported prevalence of aggression in dating relationships ranges from 20% to 60% (Arias, Samios, & O'Leary, 1987; Caulfield & Riggs, 1992; Gryl, Stith, & Bird, 1991; Koss, 1989; Makepeace, 1981; Riggs & O'Leary, 1989; Roscoe & Callahan, 1985). Among college students, Sugarman and Hotaling (1989) reported that 40% of females and 33% of males have used some form of violence against their dating partners. Gryl et al. attribute variations in prevalence reports to differences in theoretical frameworks, thus definitions of dating violence, that undergird the work of researchers. In most studies, lesser forms of violence (e.g., slapping, grabbing, pushing, or shoving) are commonly reported (Murphy, 1988; Rouse, 1988b; Worth, Matthews, & Coleman, 1990). Harsher forms of violence

(e.g., threats and assaults with weapons) are reported, but with lower frequency (Laner, 1990; Laner & Thompson, 1982; Levy, 1991).

In the benchmark study of dating violence, Makepeace (1981) surveyed 202 freshmen and sophomore students at a small state university in the rural Midwest. He found more than 60% of these students knew someone who had been involved in dating violence and more than 20% had at least one personal experience with it. More specifically, 4% of these students reported assault with a closed fist and 1% reported assault with a weapon. On a campus of 20,000 students, these percentages would translate to 800 students involved in assault with a closed fist and 200 students involved in assault with a weapon (Rouse, 1988a).

Laner and Thompson (1982) sampled a more demographically-diverse group of juniors and seniors from a large state university in an urban area in the Southwest. Of 371 respondents, 60% reported they had experienced abusive behavior in dating relationships. Of the women in this sample, 25% indicated they had been pushed, shoved, or slapped. Of 355 respondents from Oregon State University (Cate et al., 1982), more than 22% reported experiencing or inflicting abusive behaviors in a dating relationship; in 68% of these reports, the respondent was both victim and perpetrator.

Of the 355 students from Oregon State University, 37% indicated their relationship actually improved after the violence (Cate et al., 1982). Murphy (1988) noted gender-based differentiation in this view. He found that males were more often the serious aggressors, they reported higher levels of violence in *current* relationships, and they reported improvement in the relationship after the violence occurred. Females, in contrast, used milder forms of violence (e.g., slapping, kicking, biting) more often than men; they reported

higher levels of violence in *past* relationships; and they said the relationship worsened after the violence occurred. Yet, as many as 70% of females in one study (Roscoe, 1987) listed at least one form of violence (e.g., slapping, kicking) as being acceptable in dating relationships.

One mediating factor may be traditional sex-role stereotypes. Murphy (1988) suggested that these stereotypes support violent behavior as normal for males and abnormal for females. Thus, females are less likely to regard a male's violent action as a deviation from the norm, but both males and females regard violence by females as out of the norm. Nonetheless, Murphy concluded that females may be provoked to use violence as a form of defense; in contrast, males may be more likely to use violence as offense or as a way of "clearing the air." Additionally, LeJeune and Follette (1994) found that males were less likely to take responsibility for inflicting violence, more inclined to blame their partners, and more prone to be under the influence of alcohol or other drugs during violent episodes.

Billingham (1987) found a positive relationship between level of violence and depth of commitment. He suggested that conflict and violence may serve to move couples to a deeper, more committed level of involvement. Lloyd, Koval, and Cate (1989) also found that students experiencing violence in dating relationships reported feeling higher amounts of love than either those in nonviolent relationships or those who separated from the dating partner after experiencing violence. These findings may be explained, in part, by Raymond and Bruschi's (1989) observation that individuals disregarded abusive behaviors when they were countered with high-positive rewards.

In a study of dating violence in relation to gender identity and self-esteem, Burke and

Stets (1989) found that less masculine males and more feminine females were more likely to inflict and experience abuse, but they found no relationship between self-esteem and abuse. Follingstad et al. (1992) found that low self-esteem was not a predisposing factor for being a victim of violence in a relationship. A more likely predisposing factor is a history of violence in the family of origin (Rose & Marshall, 1988). Johnston (1988) concluded that those most likely to use violence had experienced it in relationships with others.

Locus of Control and Dating Violence

Locus of control, like violence, may be learned in one's family of origin (Phares, 1976; Rotter, 1966; Rotter, Chance, & Phares, 1972). Some researchers (Lewis, 1983; Long, 1986; Rotter, 1966, 1971, 1975, 1990; Rouse, 1990, 1991; Walker, 1988; Wiehe, 1987) have suggested that individuals with an external locus of control inflict more violence than those with an internal locus of control. An internal orientation, they say, may contribute to a more reasoned, less violent pattern of behavior. Theoretically, those with an internal orientation take responsibility for the outcome of events and activities in their lives. They may feel more in control and be more introspective. As a result, they may be expected to choose nonviolent conflict resolution tactics, whereas those with an external orientation may respond in opposite ways (Phares).

Rotter (1966) conducted several studies assessing the relationship between locus of control and use of violence by prisoners. His findings failed to support the hypothesis that an individual's locus of control and violent behavior are related. These studies were clouded, however, by intervening variables such as socioeconomic status, race, and specific features of the situation.

Launius and Lindquist (1988) compared the residents of a battered women's shelter (n = 22) with female students in a social and experimental psychology class (n = 23), considering the students to be nonbattered. No differences in locus of control were noted between the battered women and the presumed nonbattered students. Both groups exhibited locus of control that was generally internal in direction. The researchers speculated that women entering shelters are exercising control and may differ from women who stay in abusive relationships, with the latter group presumed more likely to have an external locus of control.

In a study of spousal violence with 60 married couples, Theodore (1992) found that the locus of control of victims was significantly more external than that of nonvictims. Abusers and nonabusers in this group did not differ in locus of control. Significant relationships were observed between the locus of control of abusive husbands and that of their victim wives. Similarly, significant relationships were observed between the locus of control of nonabusive husbands and that of their nonvictim wives.

In another study of spousal abuse, Rouse (1988b) collected data from a random sample of 79 males in a Midwestern city in a search for factors related to males' use of violence against their partners. She concluded that external locus of control may be an impediment to coping with challenges; is associated with negative feelings; and seems more likely, therefore, to influence conflict resolution tactics.

Theodore's (1992) study of spousal abuse provides the clearest evidence of some relationship between locus of control and violence experienced or inflicted. In view of the lack of significance noted in other studies, however, much remains to be learned about the

ways, if any, that violence is related to locus of control. That is particularly true in regard to violence in dating relationships; studies of relationships between dating violence and locus of control have not been reported.

Consequences of Dating Violence

The topic of violence in dating relationships is one with many unanswered questions. Nonetheless, it is a topic that demands attention. Dating violence has become prevalent in North American society and is known to affect life adjustment skills (Levy, 1991; McShane, 1988). Some researchers have likened being in an abusive relationship to being a hostage or a prisoner of war (Launius & Lindquist, 1988; Levy, 1991). Individuals in psychologically abusive settings may experience isolation, loss of self-esteem, powerlessness, and feelings of helplessness (Follingstad et al., 1992; Knight & Hatty, 1992; Lundberg-Love & Geffner, 1989; Nielsen, Endo, & Ellington, 1992; Rencken, 1989; Walker, 1984). Experiencing violence can result in lessened self-efficacy, emotional and physical health problems, and an increase in substance use and abuse (Shields & Hanneke, 1988).

Dating violence can have costly consequences for students who are seeking to form self-identities, experience intimate relationships, and establish adult-like independence (Aizenman & Kelley, 1988; Burke & Stets, 1989; Follette, 1992; Gwartney-Gibbs & Stockard, 1989; Knight & Hatty, 1992; Rickgarn, 1989; Stith, Jester, & Bird, 1992). Dating violence has the potential to affect a student's academic success and, thus, presents a challenge to college student personnel who want to provide an encouraging educational climate (Stith et al.).

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Appendix

Conflict Tactics Scale

Component Items	Scale
Reasoning Scale:	
a. Discussed the issue calmly.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
b. Gathered information to back up (your/his or her) side of things.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
c. Brought in someone to help settle things.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
Verbal Aggression Scale:	
d. Insulted or swore at the other one.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
e. Sulked and/or refused to talk about it.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
f. Stomped out of the room or house.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
h. Did or said something to spite the other one.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
i. Threatened to hit or throw something at the other one.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
j. Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
Aggression Scale:	
k. Threw something at the other one.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
l. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved the other one.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
m. Slapped the other one.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
n. Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
o. Hit or tried to hit with something.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
p. Beat up the other one.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
q. Threatened with a knife or gun.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
r. Used knife or gun.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6

The scale is: 0 = never 1 = once per year 2 = two times per year 3 = 3-5 times per year 4 = 6-10 times per year 5 = 11-20 times per year 6 = more than 20 times per year ("g" is omitted from the scoring and is therefore not used.)

Straus (1979) in Journal of Marriage and the Family, 41, 75-88.